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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 002573

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/FO, SCA/A, SCA/PB
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TAGS: PREL PTER AF

SUBJECT: NSA RASSOUL ENCOURAGED BY PAKISTAN'S PROMISES OF
CLOSER COOPERATION

KABUL 00002573 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Acting DCM Alan Yu for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. National Security Advisor Rassoul told the Ambassador that President Karzai had been impressed by the sincerity of Pakistan President Zardari in his assertions that he intended to improve and expand relations with Afghanistan. While Rassoul doubted Zardari could make good on this commitment without the support of the Pakistan Army, he was encouraged by Zardari's plans to increase regional cooperation and regularize the relationship between Kabul and Islamabad. Commenting on Karzai's recent visit to the UAE, Rassoul said the Emirates wanted a closer relationship with Afghanistan and were also seeking to establish an active regional dialogue, sparked in large part by the their concerns regarding Iran. Rassoul hoped the environment of increased regional cooperation and dialogue would re-energize the Tripartite process.

Discussion

¶2. (C) Rassoul accompanied Karzai to Pakistan to witness the September 9 swearing-in of President Zardari, where they engaged in talks with Zardari and his senior leadership. Rassoul said both he and Karzai had been impressed with the sincerity of the Pakistanis and that, for the first time, he had some hope that relations with Pakistan would genuinely improve.

¶3. (C) Zardari shared his concern for Pakistan's immediate future, saying he had 160 million people to feed and no easy solution in sight. Zardari told Karzai he and his government realized Pakistan's success depended on strong regional ties and stressed his commitment to closer relations with Afghanistan. Zardari also noted he was reaching out to India.

¶4. (C) Rassoul said that while the two Presidents had agreed that counterterrorism must be their first priority, it was also important to broaden the relationship to promote progress in areas such as trade and economic cooperation. Pakistan was working on a proposal outlining this broader cooperation and would submit it to Afghanistan for input. To establish more consistent contact, Rassoul said he and Pakistan National Security Advisor Durrani had agreed to meet

every month; Durrani is scheduled to visit Kabul at the end of October.

¶ 15. (C) While praising Zardari for his determination to engage in closer cooperation, Rassoul admitted to the Ambassador he was concerned about Zardari's ability to follow through. Rassoul said Zardari would be unable to make meaningful progress on security cooperation with Afghanistan unless he secured the support of the Pakistani Army. If, however, Zardari were able to get the Pakistan military on board, there could be dramatic improvement for both countries.

¶ 16. (C) Rassoul and the Ambassador agreed much could be accomplished if Pakistan demonstrated the political will to fight militants where it could - for instance, cracking down on domestic and cross-border cooperation and arresting senior militant leaders.

¶ 17. (C) The Ambassador asked if Karzai and Zardari had discussed the possibility of cross-border operations. Rassoul replied that Zardari and Prime Minister Gilani were not opposed to it but acknowledged they faced public backlash from civilian casualties.

¶ 18. (C) The Ambassador noted that ISAF hosts liaison officers from both Pakistan and Afghanistan; he suggested Rassoul engage General McKiernan to discuss ways in which the liaison officers might work together and with ISAF to promote a more cooperative and productive approach to combating cross-border activities. Rassoul agreed that the proof of whether Zardari could uphold his commitment to improved relations would be if the Pakistan Army followed suit on the security front.

¶ 19. (C) Regarding Karzai's recent visit to the QE, Rassoul

KABUL 00002573 002.2 OF 002

noted the Emirates wanted to "upgrade" their relationship with Afghanistan and that Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed had emphasized the UAE's desire for a closer working relationship on regional issues and wanted to establish a broader exchange of views and analysis of key issues with countries including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, the U.K. and the U.S. Rassoul said the Emirates were particularly concerned about Iran's influence in the region. Additionally, Rassoul added that Zardari appeared prepared to engage in the regional dialogue proposed by the UAE. He hoped this served to re-energize the Tripartite process.

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